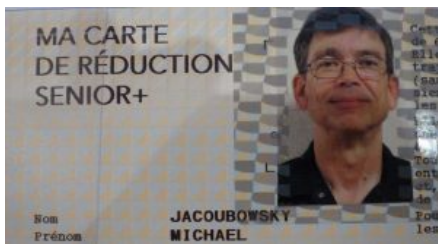


Take the long way home



My friend Larry as we leave for the gate at CDG (Paris) for our flight home.

Almost home. Another long travel day, but not nearly so long coming back from France as getting there, since I "only" have to get from Paris to San Francisco heading home, while getting there, it's flights from San Francisco to Paris, followed by a train or trains to either the Alps or Pyrenees. Alps this time.



This was also my first-time-ever taking advantage of a senior discount. A day I've put off as long as possible, but when you can get a 40% discount on first class train travel just because you're over 60, well, it's tough to turn that down!

Logistically I made the day we left a bit easier than in the past, choosing to stay at a hotel adjacent to the airport, saving the hour-or-so trip from the city of Paris to the airport (which is maybe 30 miles from the city). The hotel I chose was much nicer than expected; if you have the opportunity to stay at an Ibis Styles (part of the Accor chain), and you're not looking for a high-end high-expense "French" experience, I highly recommend it. Last year my son and I stayed at an Ibis Styles in Lyon and were similarly impressed. The rooms are Paris-sized to be sure (small) but comfortable, good air conditioning, useful bathroom (not one where you can't figure out how to keep the water from spilling out on the floor) and, at least for this one, it included a free breakfast that was really good. \$120/night for a two-bed room, \$90 for single.

The airport itself? Eh, nothing's changed, still carries the "Airport by Escher" moniker. Horrendously-long check-in lines this morning, but with even minimal status on the airline you get to bypass that. Passport control was pretty lengthy though. CDG is the only airport I've been to (and I've been to quite a few) where you really do need to arrive three hours prior to your flight.



Funny, I've been packing (or more correctly, my son has usually been packing) the Bike Friday folding bikes a certain way, and only this year I discovered it packs a lot easier if you place it chainring-side down, instead of the "normal" way. Good to think I am still learning new things, not "just" getting older.

About 3/4 of the way home right now, sitting in the United lounge in Chicago. Long time between flights, which I'm using to update this as well as create some youtube videos for the incredible rides in the Vercors region, near Grenoble. I'm getting a bit tired and sticky-feeling; first thing I do when I get home is take a shower! It's going to be really great seeing my kids, my wife, my dog, my two cats, and Mike F, Jose & Roger at the shop (and the young new guys too, Spencer and Joey). Time to get back in the swing of things.

It was very nice, even if just for a week, to get away from the normal routine with its heavy focus on business and my health issues. It's good to know I can still out-climb most, I can still take on interesting challenges where solutions need to be figured out on the fly, and dang, France hasn't gone away, it still has great food and doesn't cost much to get around.



A French Kebab, the local version of a Burrito. Only better, in my opinion. Simply awesome. I've seen no equivalent at home.

It's about this time, each year, that I think perhaps this will have been the last July trip to France for a while, that there are other places to see and ride. And I'll actually believe that, for a month or two. And then, in October, I start thinking about the route announcement for the next year, and look at the websites that focus on the route rumors, and start playing through the options in my mind. Because France feels like a second home to me, but with a different routine. What I do during my July trips to France are how I imagine a perfect retirement would be spent. The retirement won't be happening, but France can.

This was also a significant trip in that it was the first time I'd "shared" my logistical knowledge of France and the Tour de France with someone other than my son. I don't fancy myself as a tour guide, but it does make sense to share the experience with others. What comes routinely to me might seem dauntingly-complicated to others. It's nice to have a feeling that you're competent at something other than running a business. And being a father and husband of course.